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ALTERNATION IN THE STAGING OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

In his careful discussion of "Some Principles of Elizabethan Staging,"¹ Dr. George F. Reynolds states thus the view of Kilian, Genée, Brandl, and Brodmeier² concerning the nature of the Elizabethan stage:

These writers assume the triple stage [made up of front stage, rear stage, and balcony]; suppose most, if not all, of the properties to have been placed on the rear stage; and by the use of a few of Shakespeare's plays, Brodmeier alone taking account of all, attempt to establish what one may call an alternation staging; that is, that the plays were so constructed that no two differently set scenes on the rear stage ever came directly in succession, but that front and rear stage were used alternately, the rear stage being arranged while the front stage was in use.³

Most alternationists . . . tend to put almost any located scene on the rear stage. But since a clash—that is, the occurrence of two *in* scenes in direct succession—is fatal to the theory, its whole purpose being to avoid breaks and pauses in the action, scenes before and after these *in* scenes must be *out* scenes. Most scenes in some way or other, however, are located, and a large number use doors or balconies or properties [thus showing that they are played on the rear stage, according to Brodmeier], so that usually only short, relatively unimportant scenes remain to be classed as *out*. This, in turn, leads to a greater emphasis than ever on the rear stage, and to classifying as *out* any short scenes of which the purpose is obscure. At once a purpose easily suggests itself for such scenes—they fill the time while the rear stage is being prepared. This is the final result of the theory: authors, in order to secure this alternation, had so to construct their plays that no two *in* scenes should occur together, and actually composed short "carpenter" scenes for this purpose. Alternation becomes therefore a factor in play-construction—it sums up the influence upon the playwright of his theatrical environment.⁴

The present writer has, on a previous occasion, stated this theory of alternation staging in the following manner:

¹ *Modern Philology*, II, 581-614, and III, 69-97.

² Genée, *Jahrbuch*, Vol. XXVI; Kilian, *ibid.*, Vols. XXVIII, XXXVI. Full references in Reynolds, II, 582. The references to Brandl and Brodmeier are given later.

³ II, 582.

⁴ II, 586.

Professor Alois Brandl believes that, inasmuch as the back stage was furnished and arranged to represent in a rough way each specific indoor scene, two back scenes representing decidedly different interiors could not come in succession, since this would give no opportunity to change the furnishings, and the Elizabethan audiences had not learned to wait. In *Antony and Cleopatra* a scene in a room of one palace is free to follow or precede another palace scene, whether in Rome or Alexandria. But Brandl thinks that Shakespeare was compelled to insert at least one front scene whenever two back scenes with different settings would otherwise come together.¹

One method of dramatic presentation employed by the Elizabethans which seems strange to us, was clearly elucidated by Dr. Reynolds for the first time. It is the use of what he calls the symbolic, incongruous stage.

This convention allowed the presence upon the stage of a property or furnishing which was incongruous to the scene in progress, and which, during that scene, was thought of as absent, though standing in plain sight. This incongruity took two forms: either the close juxtaposition upon the stage of two properties which in reality should have been a much greater distance apart, or the presence of a property in a scene where it could never naturally have been; as a tree, for example, in the midst of a room scene. It is directly in contradiction to our modern ideal of securing complete illusion and a perfectly harmonious stage picture.²

The following passages from the conclusion of Dr. Reynolds' dissertation complete the citations which concern us at present:

Which of the four forms of staging—the simple method of the early days, the classical method of *Jocasta*, the alternation staging, or the incongruous—was most prevalent, is a question which must, in the very nature of things, remain open. The classical form could not have been very common, for the plays in their frequent changes of scene would not allow it. The others seem rather to have been used together than in any separate and carefully distinguished way. . . . Absolute tests for both alternation and incongruity are lacking; it is therefore impossible to give any definite answer to the question opening the paragraph. . . . The theory [of alternation] has been supposed to apply where it certainly does not, and its importance overemphasized.³

¹ From "Shakespeare's Stage and Modern Adaptations," *The Views about Hamlet and Other Essays*, Boston, 1904, p. 128. Brandl's view is found in his Introduction to a new edition of the Schlegel-Tieck translation of Shakespeare, Leipzig, 1897.

² III, 69.

³ III, 94, 97.

Without questioning the carefully drawn conclusions of Dr. Reynolds, it is well to ask: Are there any cases in Shakespeare where we can establish a strong probability that some definite group of scenes in a play was presented in accordance with the method of alternate staging? I shall advance the opinion that certain specified scenes in Shakespeare are of such a nature and have such a dramatic context that two things concerning them are highly probable: first, that each of these scenes was played on the front, uncovered portion of the Elizabethan stage as an outdoor scene; second, that, while the scene was being played on the front stage, the back stage, concealed by drawn curtains, was either being cleared away, or was being set for the coming scene, or was being both cleared and set.

If there is any truth whatever in the theory of alternation staging, there would be an especial occasion and reason for it in connection with an indoor scene which called for an unusually elaborate setting of the back stage. Some of these scenes, such as an elaborate judicial proceeding, a coronation, or some other state function, might well require the use of the entire stage; but even though the players overflowed upon the front stage, the properties which especially indicated the indoor nature of the scene would presumably be massed upon the rear stage, which resembled a room in being under cover. Such a scene may be termed a full scene, in distinction from one which is supposed to be confined to either the front or the rear stage. It is well, however, to remember that, when the balcony was employed to represent the summit of the wall of a castle or city, then the rear stage, representing the space immediately before this wall, was conceived as being in the open air.

I desire to show that each of the following five scenes probably owes either its existence or at least the form which it takes to the fact that the method of alternation staging was made use of in that part of the play which is concerned: *Richard II*, III, iv; *The Merchant of Venice*, III, v; *Antony and Cleopatra*, III, i; *Cymbeline*, II, i; *The Winter's Tale*, V, ii.

The scenes will be discussed in this order, which is approximately that in which they were written. There may be other

scenes in Shakespeare which would be equally in point, but I prefer to discuss only these. I am seeking merely to establish the probability of alternation staging in a few selected cases.¹

Richard II, III, iv

In scene iii of Act III, Bolingbroke, York, and others appear before Flint Castle in Wales. Percy enters and informs them that King Richard is within the castle. Bolingbroke tells the lords with him to announce the terms on which he will submit to his sovereign. There is a "*Parle without, and answer within: then a flourish. Enter on the walls, KING RICHARD, the BISHOP OF CARLISLE,*" and others. Later, after a long colloquy, Northumberland calls the King down into "the base court" to speak with Bolingbroke; Richard and his attendants come down from above and enter below (ll. 177, 183, 186). There are no directions at these places in the Folio, but these statements are made entirely certain by the context. The scene soon closes with King Richard's acceptance of Bolingbroke's demand that the banishment of the latter be repealed and his inheritance restored to him.

In this scene the balcony represents the battlements of Flint Castle. Since one of the doors of the rear stage comes into the action, they are both undoubtedly visible all the time, and we are dealing with a rear scene, or better, a full scene. This would be equally true whether the rear stage be of the type seen in the De Witt picture of the Swan Theatre, or be what Dr. Reynolds calls a "corridor stage."² What has been said would not apply to the "alcove" rear stage.³ Dr. Reynolds would "admit the alcove stage as one of the possible forms, if not as the most general form of stage construction"; but says concerning the testimony of the four early pictures:

The Swan [Theatre] could not have had an alcove stage; the Red Bull picture shows no alcove stage; the Roxana and Messalina pictures, though they might be construed to do so, perhaps do not.³

¹ The first four of these scenes were stated to be of this kind in the present writer's paper upon "Shakespeare's Stage and Modern Adaptations," *The Views about Hamlet*, etc., Boston, 1904, p. 128. The scene from *The Winter's Tale* was not mentioned. Two scenes there named, *Richard III*, III, vi, and *Julius Caesar*, III, iii, are less clear, and will not be touched upon. So far as the present writer knows, he is the first to suggest that the scenes from *Richard II*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Winter's Tale* are of this kind.

² II, 589.

³ II, 604, 603.

Elsewhere he says:

The Messalina and Roxana stages, though they allow the supposition that other doors, not shown in the picture, existed at either side of the stage, hardly suggest any such theory.¹

I will assume it as probable, therefore, that the present play was not intended for a rear stage of the alcove type.

Act IV of this play consists of the long, spectacular scene in Westminster Hall in which King Richard is deposed. The stage-direction in the Folio is: *Enter as to the Parliament, Bullingbrooke, Aumerle, Northumberland, Percie, Fitz-Water, Surrey, Carlile, Abbot of Westminster.* [An unnamed Lord, who speaks ll. 52-56, is omitted.] *Herauld, Officers, and Bagot.* Later York, King Richard, and various attendants join the company already on the stage. If any attempt at realism were made, and the Folio direction suggests such an attempt, this scene would be somewhat elaborately set. The seating of "the Parliament" would be made as impressive as possible. The bringing on and arranging of the seats would require some time, and there may well have been other features of the setting designed to give realistic quality or impressiveness to the scene. How was this time obtained?

Between the two scenes which have just been discussed comes the remarkable pathos scene of the Queen and the Gardener (III, iv). Since this scene closes the act, we naturally think of the act-interval as perhaps occupying some time; but I shall reserve the question of the act-interval for a few remarks near the close of the paper.

In scene iv of Act III, the Queen and her two ladies are walking in the garden of the Duke of York. When the Gardener and his two servants come in to their labors, the ladies step aside in order to overhear what they will say, the Queen feeling sure that they "will talk of state." In dignified blank verse the Gardener and his men interpret their garden as an allegory of a rightly ordered kingdom. When at last the Gardener declares that King Richard is to be deposed, the Queen comes forward and utters passionate lamentations.

¹ II, 592, 593.

Professor Herford well says that the Queen "has no other *raison d'être* in the drama than at intervals to reinforce our difficult and precarious pity for the king."¹ But her forebodings of evil in II, ii, followed by her grief at the evil news that Bolingbroke has landed, are an entirely natural and organic part of the play; so are the farewells of herself and Richard in V, i. The scene now before us, however, with its gardener and servants discoursing on state-craft in formal blank-verse, and almost binding up "dangling apricocks" to slow music, seems forced and artificial for Shakespeare at this stage of his development. I offer the suggestion that this artificial outdoor scene owes its existence, in part at least, to the dramatist's desire to present something upon the front stage while the rear stage, shut off by curtains, was being prepared for the spectacular deposition scene.

Scene i of Act V, which immediately follows the deposing of King Richard, takes place upon a street leading to the Tower. It is the farewell of King and Queen already alluded to. As an outdoor scene it would naturally be played on the front stage. During its progress the rear stage could easily be cleared.

The Merchant of Venice, III, v

Scene iv of Act III takes place in a room in Portia's house in Belmont, and presumably was played upon the rear stage. The great trial scene before the Duke, Act IV, scene i, while primarily an indoor scene and belonging especially to the rear stage, undoubtedly overflowed upon the front stage, and was a full scene. The opening direction in the Folio is: *Enter the Duke, the Magnificoes, Anthonio, Bassanio, and Gratiano*. Soon Shylock enters, later the disguised Portia and Nerissa. This scene was probably presented with all the pomp and display then attainable; this would concern especially the costumes worn, but some care would naturally be expended in preparing the rear stage.

The scene that comes between these two that have just been described may well be in the main a stop-gap, planned to interest the audience while the rear stage is being made ready for the trial scene. The act-divisions of *The Merchant of Venice* are given in

¹ *The Eversley Shakespeare*, VI, 130.

the First Folio; the scene-divisions are not indicated, but seem to be clear. The scene in question appears to be laid in Portia's garden. Launcelot begins by insisting to Jessica that her father's sins will be laid upon her; "therefore be of good cheer, for truly I think you are damned." Jessica pleads that her husband has made her a Christian; but Launcelot blames him for this very thing. "This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs: if we grow all to be pork-eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money." Lorenzo entering, Jessica reports to him their conversation. Lorenzo answers with a charge against the jesting servant: "the Moor is with child by you, Launcelot." This turn is most uncalled for, a gratuitous blot upon our happy Launcelot and upon a charming play. Lorenzo next commands Launcelot, "Go in, sirrah; bid them prepare for dinner." Launcelot quibbles over the meaning of Lorenzo's words. At last the latter insists that the servant shall "understand a plain man in his plain meaning," and the servant goes into the house. Jessica then utters a panegyric upon Portia, declaring enthusiastically that "the poor rude world hath not her fellow." With some charming banter between the young bride and groom the scene closes.

Now what is this scene for? It does furnish relief before the intense trial scene, and to some this will seem a sufficient reason for its existence. The feature in it that bears most directly upon the play is Jessica's tribute to Portia; but a few added lines in the moonlight scene would have served just as well. All the rest of the scene is superfluous, and one feature, as has been noted, is also offensive. Although the scene gives some charming humorous relief, I suggest, on the whole, that Shakespeare, having nothing to do while the rear stage is being prepared, is here doing nothing in an interesting way.

The two scenes which follow the trial before the Duke are played out of doors, one on a street of Venice, the other, the moonlight scene in Portia's garden at Belmont. These are presumably played on the front stage, and the rear stage is not again needed.

Antony and Cleopatra, III, i

On one occasion, while reading scene i of Act III of *Antony and Cleopatra*, the thought suddenly flashed upon me that the scene is decidedly superfluous, not a necessary part of the play. The idea came quite independently of any theory about the Elizabethan stage. And is there any weighty reason why we should follow thus carefully the campaign of Ventidius against the Parthians? What are the Parthians to us? To be sure, the scene is prepared for in II, iv, where Antony dispatched Ventidius to Parthia. The practical wisdom of Ventidius in III, i, his shrewd philosophy of life, is so excellent in itself that it blinds us to the superfluosness of the scene. He has just routed the Parthians. Silius urges him to complete the victory. Ventidius replies:

O Silius, Silius,

I have done enough; a lower place, note well,
 May make too great an act: for learn this, Silius;
 Better to leave undone, than by our deed
 Acquire too high a fame when him we serve's away.
 Caesar and Antony have ever won
 More in their officer than person: Sossius,
 One of my place in Syria, his lieutenant,
 For quick accumulation of renown,
 Which he achieved by the minute, lost his favour.
 Who does i' the wars more than his captain can
 Becomes his captain's captain: and ambition,
 The soldier's virtue, rather makes choice of loss,
 Than gain which darkens him.
 I could do more to do Antonius good,
 But 'twould offend him; and in his offence
 Should my performance perish.

Silius. Thou hast, Ventidius, that
 Without the which a soldier, and his sword,
 Grants scarce distinction. Thou wilt write to Antony?
Ventidius. I'll humbly signify what in his name,
 That magical word of war, we have effected.¹

It is noticeable that this scene comes just after the remarkable banquet and revel upon Pompey's galley, II, vii, and just before a scene in Caesar's house at Rome, III, ii, though act and scene divisions are not marked in the Folio. How much of an attempt

¹ III, i, 11-31.

was made to indicate the interior of a galley, is a question. By 1607 or 1608 the management of the Globe Theatre would probably attempt some verisimilitude in such a matter.

Brodmeier supposes that the entire preparation of the rear stage to represent the interior of Pompey's galley in II, vii, takes place while the servants who bring on the banquet are speaking the first nineteen lines.¹ Although the preceding scene has been played in the open air upon the front stage, Pompey and his force have entered "*at one doore*" and the triumvirs and their soldiers "*at another*"; and the doors seem not to have been covered during the entire scene.

The direction of the Folio at the beginning of II, vii, reads in full:

Musicke playes.

Enter two or three Servants with a Banket.

The purpose of the music seems to be to occupy the time while the rear stage is being set, presumably behind drawn curtains. When all other preparations are completed, including the bringing on of a table and seats for about a dozen persons, then apparently the music ceases, the curtains open, and the banquet is brought on by those who are to serve it. While doing this the servants talk most incisively about the drunkenness and weakness of Lepidus.

The scene between Ventidius and Silius that has already been discussed, III, i, would give an opportunity for clearing away this banquet, after the close of II, vii, and for transforming the rear stage from the cabin of Pompey's galley to a room in Caesar's house. I suggest that the scene was inserted primarily for this purpose.

Cymbeline, II, i

We can be sure that several bulky properties were employed in presenting scene ii of Act II of *Cymbeline*. The opening direction in the Cambridge Shakespeare reads: "*Imogen's bedchamber in Cymbeline's palace: a trunk in one corner of it. IMOGEN in bed, reading; a Lady attending.*" This is an interpretation and expansion of the naïve Folio direction, *Enter Imogen, in her*

¹ *Die Shakespeare-Bühne nach den alten Bühnenanweisungen*, Weimar, 1904, p. 89.

Bed, and a Lady. After l. 10 the usual editions add only one word to the direction of the Folio, *Sleepes.* *Iachimo* [*comes*] *from the Trunke.* At l. 50 the *Clocke strikes.* The *Exit* of the Folio which closes the scene, the Cambridge edition expands into *Goes into the trunk.* *The scene closes.*

Imogen has been reading three hours when the scene opens. She says to the lady in waiting,

Take not away the taper, leave it burning.

As Iachimo bends over the sleeping Imogen, he says:

the flame o' the taper

Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids.

So far the scene requires the following properties, not including Imogen's book and bracelet: a bed with the proper covering, the trunk containing Iachimo, a lighted taper and a stand, and a clock, though this was undoubtedly manipulated behind the stage. The following words of Iachimo demand some further properties, though we do not know how realistically the stage was set:

But my design,
To note the chamber: I will write all down:
Such and such pictures; there the window; such
The adornment of her bed; the arras; figures,
Why, such and such; and the contents o' the story.

In II, iv, when Iachimo convinces Posthumus that Imogen has sinned, this chamber is very elaborately described.

It was hang'd
With tapestry of silk and silver; the story
Proud Cleopatra, when she met her Roman,
And Cydnus swell'd above the banks, or for
The press of boats or pride: a piece of work
So bravely done, so rich, that it did strive
In workmanship and value
. The chimney
Is south the chamber, and the chimney-piece
Chaste Dian bathing: never saw I figures
So likely to report themselves: the cutter
Was as another nature, dumb; outwent her,
Motion and breath left out
. The roof o' the chamber

With golden cherubins is fretted: her andirons—
 I had forgot them—were two winking Cupids
 Of silver, each on one foot standing, nicely
 Depending on their brands.¹

According to the First Folio only one scene has intervened since the audience beheld this very room. Undoubtedly the chamber as seen did not wholly justify this glowing description; but was it not made to conform to it in a general way?

There is good reason for believing that the setting of the stage received greatly increased attention during the closing years of Shakespeare's career. Beginning about 1608, the masque came to its full development and to exceptional popularity under the leadership of Ben Jonson. Not only should we expect the remarkable scenic effects produced in the masques to exert an influence upon the public stage, but it is a simple matter of fact that Shakespeare's last plays, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, contain masques and masque-like features. Professor Thorndike believes that the dance of satyrs in *The Winter's Tale*, IV, iv, 352, was borrowed from Jonson's *Masque of Oberon*, presented January 1, 1611.² In *The Tempest* Shakespeare wrote what may fairly be called a masque-drama, making use in a really organic and expressive way of spectacular elements suggested by the fashion of the day. At one and the same time, he followed the fashion, filled his pockets, satisfied his artist soul, and left to after-time a "great legacy of thought."

It will be well to reproduce from the First Folio a few of the most striking stage-directions of these last plays. After Posthumus falls asleep at line 29 of *Cymbeline*, V, iv, we learn from the direction that the ghosts of his father, his mother, and his brothers enter to *Solemne Musicke*, and circle around him as he lies sleeping. At l. 92 we have the direction: *Jupiter descends in Thunder and Lightning, sitting upon an Eagle: he throwes a Thunderbolt. The Ghostes fall on their knees.*

At l. 113 *Jupiter Ascends*; and at l. 122 the ghosts *Vanish*.

The Tempest begins with *A tempestuous noise of Thunder and Lightning heard*. The elaborate directions of our modern editions

¹ Ll. 68-91.

² *Publications Modern Language Association*, XV (N. S. VIII, 1900), 116.

for III, iii, are copied almost exactly from the Folio. That at l. 52 reads: *Thunder and Lightning. Enter Ariell (like a Harpey) claps his wings upon the Table, and with a quient device the Banquet vanishes.*

When Prospero suddenly puts an end to the masque of goddesses at l. 138 of IV, i, the Folio tells us:

Enter certaine Reapers (properly habited:) they ioyne with the Nimphes, in a gracefull dance, towards the end whereof, Prospero starts sodainly and speakes, after which to a strange hollow and confused noyse, they heavily vanish.

We can be sure that the production of these elaborate stage-effects would lead to increased care in the setting of more realistic scenes. In particular, the scene in the chamber of Imogen, which we have been discussing, was undoubtedly presented with a care and a fulness of detail that would not have been expected a few years earlier.

Scene i of Act II, which precedes this one in Imogen's bedchamber, takes place out of doors, that is upon the uncovered front stage. In it Cloten makes a full display of his clownish, braggart nature; but practically nothing else is accomplished for the play, although the Second Lord soliloquizes concerning the wonder that Cloten's crafty mother "should yield the world this ass," and upon the unhappy situation of the "divine Imogen." I would suggest that this unessential front scene is inserted here in order that the rear stage, which has just served in I, vi, as the room in which Imogen receives Iachimo, may be transformed into her bedchamber, in readiness for II, ii.

But how were the settings of the bedchamber cleared away? Brodmeier believes that in the next scene, II, iii, the musicians play and sing upon the front stage, and that during this time the rear stage, concealed by drawn curtains, is being cleared. With the going away of the musicians and the entry of Cymbeline and the Queen, the curtains are again opened, and the scene gradually transfers itself to the back stage. When Cloten is left alone, he knocks upon the door of the tiring-room, which serves as the door of Imogen's chamber.¹

¹ Brodmeier, pp. 58, 79.

The varying subject-matter of the scene suits well with this bold conjecture. The gathering of the musicians and the serenade seem to belong in the open air; and the words of the wonderful song—"Hark, hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings"—fairly demand that they be sung under the open sky. Brodmeier says that Cloten and his companions "appear on the front stage as in a 'Vorzimmer' to Imogen's bedchamber"; but the bare front stage would more naturally be accepted by the audience as indicating an outdoor scene. The latter part of II, iii, is located within the palace before the door of Imogen's chamber—especially the private colloquy between Cloten and Imogen's waiting-woman, and Imogen's bitter words to Cloten. This portion would be presented on the rear stage.

The Winter's Tale, V, ii

Students of Shakespeare have been very much puzzled by the fact that the reconciliation of Leontes and Polixenes, and the discovery of the parentage of Perdita, of which we learn in scene ii of Act V of *The Winter's Tale*, are merely reported by certain gentlemen of the court, who have no claim upon our interest, and whose affected language seems at times decidedly inappropriate. We should expect these occurrences to be acted out before us and to enthrall us with their joy and pathos. The description of the statue of Hermione, "newly performed by the rare Italian master, Julio Romano," is, to be sure, a most helpful touch of preparation for the close of the play. After the Shepherd and Clown enter, we have some deliciously naïve comedy. The Clown insists:

I was a gentleman born before my father; for the king's son took me by the hand, and called me brother; and then the two kings called my father brother; and then the prince my brother and the princess my sister called my father father; and so we wept, and there was the first gentleman-like tears that ever we shed.

Shepherd. We may live, son, to shed many more.

Clown. Ay; or else 'twere hard luck, being in so preposterous estate as we are.¹

This touch of humor gives a helpful bit of relief before the intense statue scene. The scene-divisions are taken from the First Folio.

¹ L1. 150-159.

Why was this scene put into narrative? Would it not have been true in this case that "things seen are mightier than things heard"? Dr. Furness, in his monumental edition of this play, brings together the answers of a number of critics to this question, and then adds an entirely new explanation of his own. I indicate by brief quotations the more important suggestions.

It was, I suppose, only to spare his own labor that the poet put this whole scene into narrative, . . . the two kings might have met upon the stage, and, after the examination of the old Shepherd, the young lady might have been recognized in sight of the spectators.¹

Probably this scene is given in narrative that the paramount interest of the play may rest, as it ought to do, with the restoration of Hermione.²

What was Shakespeare's motive for conveying by narrative what he might have made so pathetic in representation? This is the more strange and provoking, inasmuch as narrative is by no means his forte, except when it is combined with action or passion; and those euphuistic gentlemen talk mere epigram and antithesis. . . . I suspect Shakespeare was hurried in his latter scenes, and could compose this sort of dialogue with the least aid from inspiration.³

The poet has wisely placed this recognition of Perdita behind the scenes, otherwise the play would have been too full of powerful scenes. . . . The mere relation of this meeting is in itself a rare masterpiece of prose description.⁴

It is easy to see that Shakespeare was here in a hurry to conclude; the play would have been complete had that which is here narrated been placed on the stage.⁵

Shakespeare gives merely a description of the reconciliation of Leontes and Polixenes and of the recognition of Perdita, either out of regard to the scheme of the play, which is already long drawn out, or else to avoid weakening the effect of the final scene by having it preceded by one of a similar purport. . . . It is manifest that the Poet devoted an especial care to this portion of his drama; the antitheses and parallelisms are arranged artistically, the metaphors and the style are harmoniously rounded. We have an amusing offset to the ceremonious and artistic prose of the earlier portion of the scene in the downright prose of the two Clowns with their delicious simplicity over their newly born nobility.⁶

Is it not allowable to suppose that Shakespeare was afraid of his actors? He knew, none so well, how easily deep and tragic emotion may be converted by a single false expression into not merely comedy, but even farce. . . . Let us vividly picture to ourselves what might be fairly termed the joyous, ebullient antics of Leontes, first begging pardon of Polixenes, then hugging Florizel, then worrying Perdita with his embraces,

¹Johnson. ²Harness. ³Hartley Coleridge. ⁴Gervinus. ⁵Guizot. ⁶Delius.

then wringing the old Shepherd's hand, who was crying vigorously and probably with superfluous noise,—and I think we shall be quite aware that unless all the characters were assumed by actors of commanding power, the scene would degenerate into farce and end amid uproarious jeers.¹

Hartley Coleridge and Guizot believe that Shakespeare has here lost a great dramatic opportunity; and I had long been inclined to agree with them. I cannot think that the dramatist's hurry or his desire to avoid labor are probable explanations of the difficulty. There may seem to be some force in the suggestion of Harness; but our interest in Perdita hardly rivals or imperils that which Hermione inspires. The mother lives in the daughter, and shares all her glory. The theory of Gervinus that the play was in danger of being "too full of powerful scenes," and that of Delius that it was necessary "to avoid weakening the effect of the final scene by having it preceded by one of a similar purport," deserve due consideration. But would not the ecstatic joy at the recovery of Perdita be in decided contrast with the religious solemnity of that intense moment when Hermione, the statue, flushes into life, and comes back to the world of human love? Though the two scenes are in some ways similar, are they not in many ways contrasted?

The acute suggestion of Dr. Furness, the honored master of us all, is very fascinating. But is there anything for which Shakespeare is unwilling to trust his actors? The first condition and the constant necessity of dramatic writing is that the actors be trusted. And is it probable that the dramatist who had trusted them for *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, and who trusts them here for the great statue scene, mutilated his play at this point because he was afraid of them? I confess that I am "afraid of" this ingenious explanation.

It is a complete anticlimax, after all the wealth of critical sagacity that has been expended upon this scene, to suggest that it owes its present form to the need of an open-air, front scene, during the progress of which the rear stage may be carefully arranged for the crowning statue scene. The reconciliation of the two kings and the discovery of Perdita's identity have taken place in the privacy of the palace, but the news at once flies about the

¹ Furness.

streets. During this scene of narration, the rear stage, which has just served as a room in Leontes' palace, can be transformed into the interior of a chapel in Paulina's house, where, upon a pedestal behind a curtain, stands the waiting statue.

Since Hermione and Perdita appear together only in the closing scene, where Perdita speaks but five lines, a modern star actress sometimes takes both rôles, another person assuming the part of Perdita during this final scene. It is quite conceivable that Shakespeare's company might give both parts to some young man especially gifted in presenting female rôles. The remarkable likeness between mother and daughter which the play demands would thus be assured. The absence of both Hermione and Perdita from V, ii, would facilitate this arrangement. It is possible that this suggestion furnishes a further explanation of the fact that Perdita is not allowed to appear in person in this scene.

If the intense power of the final scene was duly brought out in Shakespeare's own day—and we must suppose that in some good measure it was—great care was necessarily given to the proper arrangement of the rear stage. There is perhaps nothing else so fine in the literature of this play as the comments of Lady Martin (Helen Faucit). She tells us of the religious care which she bestowed upon every detail of this great scene, until at last, as one critic of her acting expresses it, "the solemnized hearts of the spectators were free to beat once more." In Shakespeare's day also, the preparation for that thrilling experience when the statue comes to life and descends from its pedestal would naturally be made with the utmost care. We have seen that the preceding scene has perplexed the critics, and that no two of them agree in explaining its peculiar character. The reason that has been indicated, drawn from practical stage convenience, would explain both the form of the scene and why it is that we have such puzzled and contradictory interpretations from the commentators.

CONCLUSION

I have made no account in this paper of intermissions between the acts. That there were often such intermissions we know. There was either music alone, or both music and dancing, at the end of

each of the first three acts of Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, as is made plain by the comments of the Citizen's Wife. At the beginning of Act III of Middleton's *The Changeling*, the stage-direction reads: "*In the act-time DE FLORES hides a naked rapier behind a door.*"¹ There is abundant evidence to show that there were often intermissions between the acts.²

Two different writers have recently called attention to evidence which seems to indicate that in the performances at the Globe Theatre there was no music between the acts, and presumably there were no act-intervals.

The Malcontent was first played at Blackfriars in the spring of 1603. During the unsettled state of affairs of that year . . . it fell into the hands of the Burbage company, who cut out the music elements, in the main, because that company could not present them, as the following from the *Induction* spoken in 1604 from the Globe stage indicates:—

"*Sly.* What are your additions?

Burbage. Sooth, not greatly needful; only as your salad to your great feast, to entertain a little more time, and to abridge the not-received custom of music in our theatre."³

Professor Wallace, in his most interesting and valuable work, interprets this passage as showing that "the public theatres had not yet in 1604 adopted the music introductions and interspersions of the private house."⁴

In an article in the *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* of 1908, on "Music in the Elizabethan Theatre," Mr. W. J. Lawrence comments as follows upon the above "curious passage in Webster's induction to the augmented version of *The Malcontent* (as acted by the King's players at the Globe in 1604)":

"To abridge the not receiv'd custom of musick in our theatre," plainly means that the Blackfriars' custom of playing inter-act music had little or no recognition at the Globe. It certainly cannot be taken to indicate that musicians had no employment at the famous Bankside house, where, as at other public theatres, songs, dances, and the rhymed musical monologues and farces known as jigs had to be accompanied. The inference would be that whereas (from, say, 1598 onwards) the private theatres made

¹The Mermaid *Middleton*, I, 115; and Bullen's *Middleton*, VI, 43.

²See Reynolds, II, 610, n.; also W. J. Lawrence, "Music in the Elizabethan Theatre," *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, XLIV, 37-39.

³C. W. Wallace, *The Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars, 1597-1603*, p. 116, n. 2.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 10.

a regular feature of inter-act music, the public theatres for the most part avoided it. For this diversity in routine a reason can readily be found. . . . Acting at the private theatres was by artificial light, and the higher prices of admission charged there were as much to cover the extra expense of candles or torches as to keep out the rabble. The saving of time was no serious object; acting could be proceeded with leisurely, and inter-act music indulged in. But the twenty years' experience between the building of the Theatre and the Globe had taught the players the necessary limitations. Where performances were given by natural light, and in a climate where clear skies could seldom be reckoned upon even in summer, the tendency would be to eliminate everything extraneous.¹

It seems probable, therefore, that nearly all of Shakespeare's plays were originally intended to be performed without intermissions between the acts. It is not safe to insist that this is true for all the plays. The following words of Professor Wallace suggest that there may be some exceptions:

Soon after the Burbage company took over the Blackfriars (1608), they began to develop this [the musical] side of their performance on the lines followed by the former Boys there. Certain of the Boys were taken into the Burbage company at this time. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is probably his first play written for the Blackfriars.²

I am well aware that I have not proved the fact of alternation staging in the original presentation of even these few selected portions of Shakespeare's plays. A large amount of hypothesis and uncertainty is at present unavoidable. The probability of my contention I must leave to others.

I have discussed five scenes of Shakespeare which it seems difficult to account for on purely artistic and dramatic grounds. These all come in immediate connection with indoor scenes which call for a somewhat elaborate setting of the stage. I have suggested that these questionable scenes in their actual form are due to the practical difficulties in staging the plays; that in them Shakespeare is occupying the time as best he can while the rear stage is being set, or being cleared away; that he is simply obeying one of the earliest maxims that he penned, and making "a virtue of necessity."

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¹ *Jahrbuch*, XLIV, 39, 40.

² *The Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars, 1597-1603*, p. 10, and n. 3.